



PRESS RELEASE

State and Local Officials Celebrate Start of Winter Farmers' Market Season

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NEW BEDFORD — Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matthew Beaton, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Commissioner John Lebeaux and Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Commissioner Jeff McCue, along with local officials, today

celebrated the start of the winter farmers' market season during a visit to the New Bedford Winter Farmers' Market. With over 50 winter farmers' markets to choose from across the Commonwealth, these agricultural experiences serve as a way for residents to continue to have access to fresh and locally grown products over the winter and provide opportunities for Massachusetts farmers to extend their season and sell their products year-round. The event was part of a series of events members of the Baker-Polito Cabinet attended throughout the South Coast today showcasing initiatives and announcing grants. The cabinet also hosted their weekly cabinet meeting earlier in the morning at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology.

"Winter farmers' markets are an excellent opportunity for residents of the Commonwealth to continue to buy local and support farmers and food producers year-round," **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton**. "Through opportunities like the Healthy Incentives Program, the Baker-Polito Administration continues to work with consumers and producers to ensure that all residents, regardless of income, have access to fresh, healthy, locally-sourced food provided by hardworking individuals committed to the Commonwealth's agricultural future."

The visit to the New Bedford Winter Farmers' Market highlighted Massachusetts' new Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) matching program – the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). The new program, launched by the Baker-Polito Administration on April 1, 2016, provides a dollar for dollar match to SNAP participants when they buy fruits and vegetables from participating farmers at farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets and Community Supported Agriculture farms. The maximum monthly incentive is based on household size: 1-2 member households can earn up to \$40, 3-5 member households can earn up to \$60, and households with 6 or more members can earn up to \$80 month in incentives. The incentive dollars are immediately available on shoppers' EBT cards for any future SNAP purchase. So far this year, over 2.4 million dollars have been spent on Massachusetts-grown produce due to the HIP Program – more than quadrupling the value of SNAP benefits redeemed at the same agricultural retailers in 2016.

"The demand for farmers' markets is high, and they account for a significant amount of direct marketing sales which farmers rely on for farm viability," **said MDAR Commissioner John Lebeaux**. "The collaboration between MDAR and DTA on the HIP program has been a true success story for farmers' markets and the communities they serve."

"DTA is committed to helping underserved communities overcome barriers to accessing local and affordable foods," **said DTA Commissioner Jeff McCue**. "HIP is helping our SNAP clients to eat better and live healthier by giving them a greater opportunity to purchase nutritious fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and through Community Supported Agriculture farm shares."

“Residents of Massachusetts have become increasingly interested in local food production and farmers’ markets pose an incredible opportunity to support local farmers and agriculture, especially in the winter months,” **said State Representative Paul Schmid (D-New Bedford)**. “Through collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Resources and the Department of Transitional Assistance, Massachusetts is ensuring that all residents have access to healthy, local food regardless of income.”

“The Baker-Polito Administration, particularly Commissioner Lebeaux and his team at MDAR, continues to demonstrate their leadership when it comes to food security and making fresh, healthy foods more accessible to the citizens of the Commonwealth,” **said State Representative Chris Markey (D-Dartmouth)**. “Collaborations like this typify what kind of government our taxpayers expect and deserve; one that identifies problems and offers concrete solutions that draw from multiple agencies and stakeholders with shared goals. Residents of cities like New Bedford, with greater ability to purchase healthy foods, and our farmers, able to move more product and reinvest in their own businesses, are the true beneficiaries of this collaboration, and I look forward to seeing programs like these continue to thrive under this Administration.”

“Fresh and healthy food should be accessible to New Bedford residents year-round,” **said State Representative Antonio Cabral (D-New Bedford)**. “The New Bedford Winter Farmers’ Market is a fantastic option for those seeking locally grown and nutritious food for their families.”

“The Healthy Incentives Program is a win-win for local growers and those in need, who will benefit greatly from the abundance of produce that is still available at farmer’s markets during the winter months,” **said State Representative William Straus (D-Mattapoisett)**.

“A winter farmer’s market is immensely beneficial for New Bedford families seeking access to fresh foods within our thriving downtown arts and cultural district,” **said Senator Mark Montigny (D-New Bedford)**. “Fresh, healthy options help prevent costly chronic disease while also providing an economic boost to hardworking area farmers.”

“We were all told how important it is to eat your fruits and vegetables. Farmers’ Markets have a unique capacity to bring a community together by giving local residents the opportunity to support local farmers, while also supporting their own overall health,” **said State Representative Robert Koczera (D-New Bedford)**. “Access to quality food should never be determined by your socioeconomic status alone, so I will continue to support programs, like the ones modeled here at the New Bedford Winter’s Farmers’ Market, which help make that a reality.”

“We are more than excited to kick off the Indoor Winter Farmers Market season in New Bedford. Our winter market will now be open on a weekly basis, providing residents with a one-stop location to buy all their locally grown and made goods, and providing farmers and other retailers with an outlet to directly

sell to the public,” **said Stephanie Perks, Co-Founder of Coastal Foodshed.** “Our downtown winter market will also provide SNAP recipients with access to the extremely beneficial HIP program all year long, which was hugely successful during our summer and fall market season, so we are happy to be able to offer it throughout the winter and spring as well.”

To find a winter farmers market near you, visit the Mass Grown and Fresher interactive [map](#).

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